

Blind Slaves of our Prejudices: Debating 'Culture' and 'Race' in Norway

Despite an upsurge in the number of panels on 'multiculturalism' and 'cultural studies' at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the discipline has not been in the vanguard when it comes to debates on race, racism and multiculturalism, or revising the canon. Yet the failure of the discipline to be at the vanguard of such debate stems in part from a belief that it has, all along, been at the vanguard. Indeed, has not anthropology stood precisely for the equality and relative value of all cultures. The very issues the 'culture wars' seem to raise?

VISWESWARAN 1998:70

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ABSTRACT *This article discusses the works of two anthropologists who have applied the notion of racism to contemporary Norwegian society. Inger-Lise Lien defines racialization as a natural process, and racism as acts with hostile intentions, while Unni Wikan defines racism broadly in terms of the concept of culture: 'Culture' has become a new concept of race in that it functions in a reductionist manner to make 'them' lesser human beings than 'us'. While Lien defines racism in such a way that very few practices can be discussed as possible examples of racism, Wikan's definition makes almost everybody a racist, at the same time as she only applies her definition to a limited set of acts. In spite of their differences, the two authors seem to share a widespread but unacknowledged majority perspective which includes blindness to the effects of racialization and racism on the people affected when these effects do not confirm hegemonic majority ideas. The article discusses the reasons for the general majority blindness and the challenges it poses for anthropology.*

KEYWORDS *Culture, racialization, racism, nationalism, 'anthropology at home'*

With a few notable exceptions (such as Stolcke 1995), anthropologists have until recently not been engaged in the study of racism in contemporary Europe. Due to the negative ring of the word 'race' since World War II, anthropologists have instead preferred to study ethnic groups and minority identities within the modern nation state (for example Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 1997; Wilmsen & McAllister 1996). Because a focus on ethnicity allows 'race' to slip in through the back door (Wievorka 1995), anthropologists potentially have much to gain from the more explicit discussions of racialization (the categorization of people on the basis of characteristics that are assumed to be innate) and racism.

Classic, so-called scientific racism, can be defined as forms of ideology in which human races are defined as permanent physical differences, with a direct association between physical attributes and qualities such as morality and intelligence. This implies that together the 'races' constitute a hierarchy with 'the superior white race' at the apex, and the other races in inferior positions. Since World War II these ideologies have been rejected. Nevertheless, in the 1980s and the 1990s, sociologists, philosophers, and political scientists have examined to what extent and in what ways racist ideologies have been transformed and revitalized in the encounter with Third World immigrants to Europe after World War II.¹ According to these theories, 'culture' now replaces the notion of 'race' in the rhetoric of the political Right. The new ideologies, theorists maintain, foreground cultural differences without explicitly saying that some 'cultures' are better than others. But since the differences are often depicted as irreconcilable, this way of arguing is often linked to the view that different groups should live separately, each where they 'belong'. When this view is connected to institutional power, it can be a basis for discrimination and exclusion.

In this article I want to discuss the current mix of rhetoric with particular reference to the cultural climate in Norway. My contention is that the current situation is more fluid, differentiated and complex than just a historical change from a traditional to a 'new' racism. I use the specificities of the Norwegian scholarly debate to illuminate some of the challenges to the discipline of anthropology posed by immigration. The main substance of the article is a close reading of the ideas of two Norwegian anthropologists in order to assess how they approach the topic of racism. I have chosen texts by Inger-Lise Lien and Unni Wikan, first, because they are among the few Norwegian anthropologists who have written explicitly and extensively about racism.² Second, both authors have published both for scholarly audiences and for the general public, and have much political influence in Norway. Their analytical ideas about racism are radically different, but the political implications of their work seem to be similar. When read together, they represent the range of the present-day consensus on these issues in Norway. I discuss their contrasting definitions of racism and their different characterizations of Norwegian society and I treat their publications simultaneously as theoretical writings and as data about the current cultural and political climate in Norway. These analyses lead to a discussion of the concept of culture, and of the inevitable blind spots of any scholarly analysis. I argue that the main contribution of the study of racism to anthropology is that it helps anthropology to become truly comparative, because the study of racism necessitates taking more seriously than before

the study of majority populations 'at home'. It is no longer enough just to study marginalized groups. Such studies now have to be framed within majority–minority power structures and the global history of colonial and neo-colonial relations.

Since I, like the two authors whose works I discuss, am a white Norwegian anthropologist doing 'anthropology at home,' I want to ground the theoretical discussion that follows in the perspective of someone who has suffered racism. A poem by the Norwegian poet Bertrand Besigye (who has a part white Norwegian and part black African family background) is particularly helpful in this regard. The poem is called 'Racist I accept you' (*Rasist jeg tar i mot deg*). In terms of its positioning, it reveals some of the effects of racialization and racism within structured majority–minority relations. In addition, in terms of its content, it exemplifies the current common-sense understanding of racist discrimination as the expression of hatred, at the same time as it also opens up for the understanding of other forms of racism that are just petty, trivial and blind.

From Being Powerless to Empowerment

RACIST I ACCEPT YOU

Racist I will accept you
 if you really hate and not only is a slave blind
 to your own prejudices, if you really hate me
 then you will also be obliged to *see me*
 if you deeply and sincerely hate all other races
 and not just hate for hate's sake
 for the sake of those who think like you because you are bored
 or because you are scared of anything strange
 which seems to threaten your comfortable lethargy
 if you raise yourself clearly above such banality
 if you would have granted me your hate equally wholeheartedly
 if there had not been a single nigger in this country
 if you expose yourself in your hate
 if you devote all your time and energy to hate
 and hate me endlessly and continuously with every cell in your body!
 And not because you are looking for a scapegoat
 Somebody you can oppress beneath your shame, a toilet seat for the soul!
 But for my sake, for the sake of my race
 racist, I accept you, I kiss you!
 If you take upon yourself the hate of all the other racists

and crucify yourself with hate, if only the *sight* of brown, yellow
 and red makes you *so sick* that you have to be taken instantly
 to the hospital, if you are willing to *gouge out your own eyes*
 just to avoid seeing more niggers
 if you are willing to sacrifice your mother your father your sister your brother
 just in order to cultivate your hate fulltime without restrictions
 if your hate is completely cleansed of the desire
 for personal gain, if you would sacrifice everything give everything
 just so you could build a cathedral of hate in your soul
 just so you could bathe your senses in the clear waters of wraith
if you are totally willing to take your own life
 just to avoid something as degrading
 as having to live on *the same planet*
 as these damned niggers!
 Then, dear racist, I will accept you
 Then I will willingly be yours BERTRAND BESIGYE 1993³

The poem is written as a monologue by the 'I' of the poem who has apparently suffered racism and is addressed to a 'you' who is a racist. It can be read as an appalling celebration of hatred, and thereby as a continued binding to oppression. However, the poem is complex and polysemous, and I choose to read it with a focus on its exaggeration. The demand for hatred is so exaggerated that it loses all realism: The 'you' of the poem has to be willing to sacrifice absolutely everything in the name of hatred. In my reading of Besigye's poem, it depicts an act of transcending the enervating triviality of what might be called everyday racism.

In the poem, the extreme hatred without conditions creates its own polar opposite: love ('racist I accept you, I kiss you'). Thereby the actual racist harassment suggested by the expression 'these damned niggers' is condemned. Many reasons for racist acts are mentioned, but they are all rejected as small and mean in relation to the ideal abandonment of extreme hatred. Through the challenge of the extreme demand, the 'I' of the poem is able to create an idealized imaginary enemy and can thus disregard the pettiness of everyday racism.

The 'I' of the poem is not content to be an accidental scapegoat or target, but wants to be seen and recognized as an individual. To be seen as a separate and unique individual, distinct from other hate objects can be the first step to have one's frame of interpretation and experiences recognized.

In the imagined confrontation, the 'I' transforms powerlessness and asymmetry into strength and symmetry, demonstrating the fact that powerlessness

is often most palpable in the moment it is relinquished: It disappears through the *élan vital* that enables a person or a group to leave resignation behind and take control of their lives. To be powerless is to lack both control over one's life and the social recognition of one's dignity. Empowerment is to be freed from being spoken by others, and to be able to formulate one's own experiences with one's own words. Often powerless people lack the concepts and models for understanding the social world they both relate to and inhabit. They struggle for new forms of knowledge that make it possible to form new subject positions and new forms of social action. An important part of the process is to obtain the ability both to conceptualize and narrate one's own experiences and to communicate them to others who are willing to listen.

A national dimension is hinted at (the poem refers to 'niggers' in 'this country') as well as a global dimension (just to avoid something as degrading as living on *the same planet* as these damned niggers!). The denigrating term 'nigger' (*svartinger* in Norwegian) demonstrates the racist reduction of all experiences and identities into two polar opposites. It is suggested that an extreme devotion to hatred can imply getting in touch with the transcendental, bringing purification and perhaps rebirth. In particular the formulations 'I accept you', 'crucify', 'sacrifice', 'cathedral', 'clear waters of wreath', draw on a Christian religious dimension. If the racist meets the ideal demands, the 'I' of the poem takes on an almost God-like role in the ability to 'accept' the racist 'you'.

Sight is a metaphor for the disappearance of blind prejudices. The petty racism of everyday life is blind in the sense of being without any insight: Only by *really* hating, will the 'you' of the poem be 'obliged to see me'. Similarly to King Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (who pierced his eyes because he in his pride had not seen – had been blind in relation to – the misdeeds he committed) the 'you' of the poem can only gain true insight if he/she is willing to gouge out his/her eyes 'just to avoid seeing more niggers'.

Through the blindness of the racist, 'discriminator' and 'victim' can each experience powerlessness, although in different ways. The dividing line between the victim ('I') and the racist ('you') is thus blurred and becomes ambiguous. This aspect of the poem echoes Frantz Fanon's (1986:83–108) psychoanalytical and Hegelian analyses. For Fanon, Blacks and Whites are both caught up in racism. The white person is blind in relation to his own position, while the black person sees himself in relation to the white person and is therefore constantly reminded of his difference. It is therefore easier for a black person than for a white person to transcend his/her position. The poem by Besigye thus reminds white readers of the inevitable blindness of the ma-

majority position, and thus of the necessity of adopting a reflexive voice, critical of unexamined assumptions.

Norway, a Case in Point

Since World War II, racism has become a negatively loaded concept all over Europe, and especially in the German-speaking and the Nordic countries. People in Norway generally associate the term 'racism' with Nazism, the segregationist policies in the southern states of the US, and the apartheid regime in South Africa. Nobody, except tiny groups of about a total of 200 political extremists, today identifies with ideologies that are explicitly racist. When majority people suspect that they are being accused of racism, this usually leads to profound shame, embarrassment and vigorous defense. In ways that are similar to what goes on in other European countries, the word racist is often mentioned as a part of a denial (Hervik 1999; van Dijk 1993), such as in the commonplace expression 'I am not a racist, but...' Fear of being called a racist is often used as an explanation of other people's blameworthy acts as well as of their lack of adequate action. In addition, many people see a contradiction between working against minority oppression of women and working against majority racism. The way this is currently perceived, to support one cause indicates that one does not support the other. All of this paradoxically implies that the word racism is relatively dominant in public debates (as denials of racism), while experiences of racialization and racism are seldom publicly debated.

Majority Norwegians see themselves as *victims* of Danish colonialism and Nazi-German occupation,⁴ and not as being influenced by an unacknowledged racist culture. According to popular self-images, Norway is innocent in relation to colonialism. The inhabitants supported the civil rights movement in the US, as well as the ANC in South Africa. Norway has played an important role in peace negotiations in various regions such as the Middle East, Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Columbia. Moreover, Norway is among those nations in the world that spends the most money per capita on development aid to the Third World. So, when minority people complain of local racism, the innocent national self-image and the associated collective memory are at stake (Gullestad 2001b, 2002a). 'Immigrant' representations of Norway which do not underwrite majority hegemony are still few and far between in the Norwegian public realm.

This is probably part of the reason why the recent European research on racism has not been seriously discussed in Norwegian academic life.⁵ Norwegian scholars have been relatively little interested in racism.⁶ When racism

is on the scholarly agenda, it is usually given the narrow scientific racism definition.⁷ And in addition, there is a tendency to see racism as an individual and not as a structural phenomenon.⁸ Up to now the main focus has been on the extremist and self-proclaimed racism (Bjørge 1997; Fangen 1998), and not on the everyday discrimination.⁹ Important as this focus is, a wider and more differentiated approach to racialization and discrimination is required, taking into account the many different forms of contemporary racism.

The Word that Labels the Devils

My first example represents a narrow and individualized definition of racism. In 1996, Inger-Lise Lien published a book called *Ordet som stempler djevlene* (*The word that labels the devils*). Lien conducted anthropological fieldwork both in Pakistan and among people of Pakistani descent in Oslo. The book is written both as an anthropological monograph and as a polemical argumentation against political anti-racism. It is a scholarly book, written for a general audience, describing the way of life of 'Pakistanis' in Oslo,¹⁰ taking racism as the main theme. Lien's aim is to define racism precisely, and this is an aim I fully support. However, the question is if the definition she proposes can catch the differentiated and shifting motivations and justifications for discriminatory practices. In the following quote, Inger-Lise Lien considers what happens in situations when minority people are given unwanted attention because of the way they look:

When the difference (*anderledesheten*) demands attention, it is uncomfortable (*ubehagelig*) for the person who is stared at or who does not obtain eye contact. It is tiring to receive this kind of attention, and it can make one angry and aggressive. Nevertheless: a difference which demands attention is not necessarily something that we can call racism, but it is a racialization. It is an attention in the new situation. (Lien 1997:65, translated from the Norwegian).¹¹

At first the view-point in this quote is the minority person's: the one 'who is stared at or who does not obtain eye contact', and who therefore becomes 'angry and aggressive'. However, the viewpoint then shifts to a majority perspective. Even though the empirical substance of Lien's book is based on fieldwork among people in Oslo of Pakistani descent, the topic of minority anger is left in order to privilege the question of whether unwanted attention qualifies as an act of racism. To this question, Lien's answer is no.

To illustrate the above analytical point, Lien introduces an utterance from a majority lady from Bærum (Bærum is an affluent residential area just outside Oslo). The lady is reported to have told the following 'sensational' news to her

friends: 'Imagine, I saw a black man jogging in Vestmarka (a recreational area where people engage in out door activities such as hiking). I have never seen like that before. I just stood there, staring.' According to Lien, majority people cannot help paying this kind of attention. It is the differences in a 'new' situation (as perceived by Lien and many others) that 'demand' attention. If I understand her correctly, staring at a jogging black man is, thus, not an act of will, just natural curiosity. Because the intent is not hateful, and because the racialized attention is considered as natural, the 'immigrants' anger at being stared at has to recede in favor of majority people's natural response to differences.

The small anecdote is interesting because it lends itself to different interpretations. My own interpretation is, first, that the event was so striking to the lady that she was inspired to turn it into a story to tell her friends. I think this is a key to its interpretation. Second, to stare at other people is usually regarded as bad manners, unless one is looking at street performers or at people who have indicated in some way that they want to be stared at. Normally a polite lady from Bærum would not dream of staring at another polite lady, and even less at a gentleman. Thus, what is regarded as common decency in relation to someone who is seen as more or less similar, is not considered necessary if the person is black. The behavior the lady reports could be compared to the way people in the past watched the exhibits of Blacks as curiosities at fairs and markets.¹²

To understand the Bærum lady's reactions, it might be interesting to ask what was most surprising to her, apart from the obvious fact that the jogger was black – to see him running or to see him out in nature? In other words, what was most important, the activity or the place? I suggest the place. It is a part of the national self-image that Norwegians are white, and that they are very close to and fond of nature. Implicitly the lady seems to be saying that a black man is out of place in Norwegian nature.

The incident might also have a sexual content. According to widespread stereotypes in Norway, black men are seen as particularly sexually and erotically attractive (Fredriksen 2001; Gotaas 1996). It is tempting to suggest a parallel between the curious female stare in Lien's anecdote and the curious (and lustful) male stare so often condemned by feminists.¹³ Even though the incident is small and trivial, it can thus be interpreted in a way that potentially opens up for new insights into the cultural grounding of everyday practices of racialization and discrimination.

Nevertheless, Lien's point of view is that the minority people who are offended because of this kind of attention only have themselves to blame:

Some immigrants experience the staring as insulting, and see it as racist. For this reason they perhaps become very self-opinionated (*selvbevisste*). Some deal with it more badly than others (*takler dette dårligere enn andre*), and feel both a gaze and the lack of a gaze as annoying. Sometimes they invest the gaze with intentions that are not there. The staring (*blikkene*) may be motivated by pure curiosity, but are easily interpreted as hostile.

The exaggeration in their interpretations can lead to problems for the immigrants' self-respect, and can also lead to problems for the researcher who wants to register the extent of experiences of racism, as seen by the immigrants (Lien 1997:35, translated from the Norwegian).

The difference between my interpretation and Lien's interpretation of staring as 'pure curiosity' indicates many questions that need to be further examined. First, the fact that intentions are not negative does not necessarily imply that they are positive. I think this is an important analytical distinction. Second, the story does not tell how the black man reacted to the staring, in other words what were the effects of this particular act. Small and trivial racializing incidents with no hateful intentions can still have a negative effect on the people who experience them over and over again. The most notable example in the literature is Franz Fanon's (1986 [1952]) reflections over what it meant to him when a little boy noticed him in a park and said 'Look, a Negro!' to his mother. Third, it is crucial to study the potential relevance of these kinds of racialization in decision-making situations on the labor market or the housing market. If the lady were to rent out an apartment or hire a new employee, would she be reluctant to take in a black man?

Even if the lady in Bærum was happy (and perhaps proud) to report the staring incident to her white friends, she would probably be embarrassed and angry if the jogging black man had stopped and asked her why she was staring. My guess is that she would have interpreted this as an accusation of racism and would have defended herself vehemently. On the one hand she would not be motivated to listen attentively, on the other hand the question might start a process of reflection. In order to understand such micro-events, it is therefore necessary to scrutinize them analytically in order to tease out the underlying assumptions. Because Lien sees the intentions as good, or at least neutral, and racialization as a natural psychological process, she does not engage in such an analysis. Inadvertently she thus contributes to the public silencing of the anger of the racialized. The anger is dismissed without discussion.

Lien's view of racialization as a natural process is more systematically presented in her article entitled 'How to diagnose racism?' (*Hvordan diagnostisere*

rasismen?) (Lien 1997). In order to make her diagnosis, she refers to Robert Miles (1989) and his critique of Barker's (1981) idea of 'the new racism':

Miles also differentiates between racism and racialization. Racialization is something everybody does: We register differences between black and white skin color, and this registration is without a positive or negative evaluation. But when we start to add positive or negative attributes (*kjennetegn*) to this registration of differences, we get a negative picture of for example the black person, or a negative system of meanings that can be used to exclude the black person. That is racism. While racialization is a natural cognitive process, racism is a negative continuation of that process. It is thus racism when people perceive and define others in a thoroughly negative and stereotyped manner, and this leads to social exclusion. [...] There has to be a negative intention behind the exclusion observed. Without this negative intention, based on a negative image, it is meaningless to call the phenomenon racism (Lien 1997:20, translated from the Norwegian).

There is no doubt an important distinction between noticing a difference and investing it with negative attributes. At the same time I disagree with the view that racialization in the form of 'differences between black and white skin color' is 'a natural cognitive process'.¹⁴ Interpretations of differences are not universal, but emerge in historically specific processes as human beings give meaning to what goes on around them. When some physical features appear as particularly visible, this is not only due to the features themselves, but to historically specific frames of interpretation that have become self-evident and self-explanatory for many people. Visibility, in the sense of prominent features that are invested with particular meanings, is not natural and universal but is historically specific and culturally produced and reproduced through fleeting and shifting negotiations. According to race theory (such as Goldberg 1993; Winant 2000:188), present-day racializing is deeply rooted in history, as a racial *longue durée* in which phenotypical signification was gradually inscribed on the human body during the several hundred years of European expansion and hegemony, at the same time as racial thinking and practice is historically contingent, fluid, continuously shifting, relational and processual.

Racist discrimination does not only take place on the basis of visible differences, it can also be produced by discrimination (Rex 1986). In England, the Irish were subjected to racialization and racism, even though there were no remarkable physical differences between them and the other Brits (Miles 1989: 36, 58; Mac An Ghail 1999). The same thing goes for Jews all over Europe. Recent analyzes also report that Eastern Europeans are racialized in Western

Europe in terms of degrees of whiteness: Russians are on the top and Albanians at the bottom (Lazaridis 2000).

Lien's definition of racism as individual acts with negative intentions based on hateful feelings leads her to the conclusion that there is little racism and that there are few racists in Norway. Her analysis thus safeguards the hegemonic self-image of Norway as an innocent, non-racist society. However, her conclusions are contradicted by a number of reports (ECRI 1997; Høgmo 1998; Lunde 2000; SMED 2001; Sopemi 2000; UDI 2000) as well as personal accounts (Ali 1997; Johnsen 1996; Tajik 2001; Wamwere 2000). In personal accounts, various 'people of color' talk about their experiences of racializing discrimination and how they are ignored when they put their experiences into words (see, in particular, the contributions of Buntu, Kvam and Sandnes in Tajik 2001, as well as Gullestad in press). When they try to communicate their experiences to majority Norwegians, they are often told that they are 'obsessed with skin color', 'aggressive' or 'too sensitive.' The hegemonic majority perspective acts as a barrier against seriously discussing racialization and racism in the public realm. The public realm is in this sense a 'white public space' (Page & Thomas 1994).

According to John Rex (1986:17) there is an 'unconscious racism' embedded in the available linguistic categories in advanced industrial societies. David Theo Goldberg, on his part, uses the expression 'racist culture'. These are general ways of formulating the important insight that racism is a socio-cultural phenomenon, and that there are often connections between linguistic categories, ideas and images and discriminating practices. The idea that Norway is a homogeneous society, and that racialization is a response to a new phenomenon in a new situation, makes these interconnections invisible. The situation is of course new in the sense that many people in Norway still remember the first time they met a colored person face-to-face. But transformed versions of ideas and images with a longer history and a much wider geographical extension influenced this first meeting – and later meetings. The ideas and images of colonialism, as well as of the anti-Semitism and the eugenics movement between the two world wars were all once influential in Norway (Pihl 2000, 2002). As in other European countries, these ideas seem to some extent to persist in transformed and unacknowledged ways, deriving their force from being embedded in other and more legitimate discourses and historical themes (Gullestad 2001b).

Racism in the Name of the Good

The second scholar whose work I want to discuss in this article is Unni Wikan. Wikan is an internationally renowned anthropologist who has done

fieldwork in Egypt, Oman and Bali, and has published widely on this research. As an expert on the Middle East she has worked closely with the Norwegian government for many years with regard to the local Muslims. On this basis, she has published an analysis of what she sees as Norwegian racism in a book in Norwegian for the general public (Wikan 1995), as well as in an article in English in *Social Anthropology* (Wikan 1999).¹⁵ In the article, she summed up the main points in the book for her international anthropological colleagues.

At first glance Wikan seems to take up the challenge of addressing the unacknowledged everyday racialization. However, her main target is the violence of Muslim men in their families and their misuse of the Norwegian welfare system. According to her, Norwegian authorities encourage the creation of an ethnically-based underclass by offering too generous welfare payments and by excusing the violence of male immigrants towards their women and children out of 'respect for their culture' and out of fear of being called racists.¹⁶ The thrust of her argument is that the people in Norway who try to treat immigrants fairly, practice a 'foolish generosity' that is built on a misguided notion of culture. They have good intentions, but think and act in a racist manner; they 'do harm in the name of the good'. Wikan calls these practices racism, 'cultural fundamentalism' and 'welfare colonization'. The main argument of the book is that the Norwegian government needs to be more restrictive and make more demands in relation to 'immigrants' or else their generosity will be misused. Its uncontested value has been to effectively put the plight of Muslim women and children in conflict-ridden families on the political agenda. At the same time her way of doing this (by pointing to Muslim culture as the reasons for various problems) has contributed to the stigmatization of large groups of innocent people, in particular Muslim men, and thus to the dramatic change of political climate in relation to 'immigrants' in Norway in the 1990s.¹⁷ Her book has been used by politicians in the populist right-wing Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) to argue against immigration.¹⁸ This party is currently one of the largest in Norway, according to the opinion polls. Elsewhere (Gullestad 2002b), I have demonstrated that in Wikan's book Muslims are assigned the blame for the stereotypes about them in the Norwegian media, and their ways of life in Norway are contrasted to an idealized and homogenizing notion of 'basic Norwegian values'. While Moslems, according to Wikan, ought not to be condoned on the basis of culture, the Norwegianness they have to adopt is all the same implicitly defined in cultural terms. The political implications of Wikan's work have been debated by many authors (see for example Fuglerud 2002; Hervik 2002b; Seltzer &

Ylvisaker 2003). I will in the present article focus more narrowly on her definition of racism.

The following quotations contain in condensed form Wikan's definition of racism and her main empirical contention about present-day Norwegian society. The first quotation is taken from her scholarly article in *Social Anthropology* (1999), the second from her book for the Norwegian general audience (1995):

The gist of my argument is as follows: 'Culture' has become a new concept of race in that it functions in a reductionist manner to make 'them' lesser human beings than 'us'. Whereas 'we' regard ourselves as thinking, reasoning, acting human beings with the ability to reflect and respond to changing circumstance, 'they' are portrayed as caught in the web of culture and propelled to do as culture bids (Wikan 1999:58).

What is racism? It is to treat another group of people as being of little value because of ethnic markers. 'Culture' functions in a racist way if it is *a model of human life that we use only to understand 'them' but not ourselves*. And this is my contention: While we treat Norwegians as people with different character traits and with the ability and the will to think for themselves, immigrants are by and large treated as products of their culture – as if they were powerless in relation to the culture and had no independent judgment. But by doing this we participate in taking from them motivation and intention, even stupidity and foolishness – essential human qualities. This shows a lack of respect which is degrading. (Wikan 1995:18, translated from the Norwegian, italics in the original).¹⁹

In the quotations, there are no direct references to differences of 'race', only to 'ethnic markers'. But Wikan's readers (and anyone else discussing these issues in Norway) can rely on a recent and by now self-evident discursive dichotomy. In this dichotomy 'immigrants' are people who either themselves or whose parents 'come from' regions of the world that are considered 'non-Western' in Norwegian official statistics: Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe as well as Turkey (Bjertnæs 2000). In public debate, 'immigrants' and 'Muslims' are the terms most often used (Jenssen 1994:355). According to Hernes and Knudsen (1990), nine out of ten majority Norwegians reserve the use of the word 'immigrant' for people with what is perceived to be a 'dark skin color'.

Wikan does not connect her observations to the scholarly literature on racism in Europe. But, at first glance, her ideas seem to resemble the theory that 'culture' is now replacing 'race' in popular rhetoric. However, there are also some crucial differences. First, Wikan does not focus on the political Right, but on well-meaning and well-educated parts of the population, such as teachers, lawyers, social workers as well as Norwegian government officials in general.

Formulated in abstract terms, I agree with this point (see also van Dijk & Wodak 2000; van Dijk 1993). By analyzing the utterances of the Norwegian elite (including Wikan's work), I have found that well-meaning and discriminating utterances often rely on the same set of ideas and concepts as the hate inciting utterances of political extremists (Gullestad 2002b). Second, she does not see the popular use of the concept of 'culture' as non-hierarchical. On the contrary, without using the word, she anchors her characterization of Norwegian racism in the inferiorization that emerges when one uses different models for others than for oneself. Even though I disagree with her narrow application of her definition of racism, I believe that there is often an element of hierarchy and inferiorization in contemporary majority–minority relations in Norway. Third, and most importantly, Wikan successfully addresses the need for engaging effectively and consistently with the suffering of women and children in problem-ridden minority families, but she does not use her definition of racism to focus on acts of hatred or on the more trivial everyday racialization on the labor market and the housing market. By arguing for more toughness and less generosity, she does not challenge widespread majority self-images and social perceptions. On the contrary, her use of the word racism masks her support of majority prejudices by channeling real frustrations into criticisms of 'them'.

'Culture' in Norway

In spite of these differences of opinion, it is interesting to ask if Wikan is right in saying that majority Norwegians do not apply the concept of culture to themselves. Her evidence is taken from her own personal experience as well as from articles in the mass media. Based on my own research in Norway (reported in Gullestad 1979, 1984 [2002], 1992, 1996a, 1997, 2002a), I suggest that she is at the same time both right and wrong.

'Culture' (*kultur*) is a complex and polysemous concept in Norway. The word can signify (1) the *cultural sector* covered by the official cultural policy (encompassing, in particular, 'culture' in terms of art works and historical monuments); (2) 'culture' understood more broadly as *ways of life* ('rural culture', 'working class culture') and as *patterns of social action* (for example in the utterances 'at this place of work a culture has developed which consists in covering each other no matter what happens'); as well as (3) 'culture' as *frames of interpretation* (focusing not primarily on what people say or do, but what they take for granted when they say and do whatever they say and do).

The word 'culture' is also ambiguous in terms of value. In some contexts the term carries positive connotations; in other contexts the connotations

are negative. As a negative term, 'culture' is contrasted to the positive notion of 'nature' and becomes associated with the 'artificial' and the 'unnatural' (see Gullestad 1992:201–210). Culture can also be class-laden: associated with *finkultur* ('fine culture', 'high culture') in contrast to *folkekultur* ('the culture of the people'). The notion of culture is also negative in expressions such as *grådighetskultur* ('culture of greed'), *trikse- og fiksekultur* ('culture of petty criminality') and so on. In these contexts, *kultur* can be read as a synonym for the negative term *ukultur* ('unculture').

The positive use of the word 'culture' confers value to objects and events. To link something to 'culture' can be a way of making it more visible and valuable. This has happened frequently the last thirty years by means of terms such as 'local culture', 'urban culture', 'working-class culture', 'women's culture' and 'children's culture'. These are regarded as forms of popular culture in contrast to *finkultur* ('fine culture'). There are thus both tensions and links between 'culture' and the ways of the people (*folkelighet*). The concept of culture is located within complex networks of concepts and practices, and its span of ambiguity in terms of meaning and value is large. It has thus a great potential as a politically powerful concept.

Over the last decades, a revitalization of Norwegian national identity has taken place, as a response to individualization, immigration, Europeanization and globalization (Gullestad 2002 a, b). In this revitalization, 'culture' is a central notion: It is important 'to feel secure in one's own culture' (*være trygg i sin egen kultur*). That Norwegians use the notion of culture about themselves is also evident in the expansion of the neologism *fremmedkulturell* ('of foreign or strange culture') about 'immigrants' from 'non-western countries'. The expression implies that the difference between 'them' and 'us' is not that 'they' have culture while 'we' do not, but that majority people regard 'their' culture as strange and alien, and 'our' culture as close and familiar.

This view can be observed in many contexts, both in everyday life and in government documents. The following is a quotation from a parliamentary white paper:

A support of the national culture needs to embody great respect for the cultures of other countries. To strengthen Norwegian culture does not imply that it is better than everybody else's culture, but that it is important because it is *ours*. Because it embodies *our* very history, our traditions, our way of life, the very form and the content which generations before us have given their ideas and dreams (*Stortingsmelding* No. 61, 1991–92:25, translated from the Norwegian, italics in the original).

In this quotation, the argument is explicitly non-hierarchical. Nevertheless, at the same time 'our' cultural expressions are valued not because they offer something of universal importance to humanity, but because they are 'ours.' Implicitly this suggests that the possibility that other people's traditions might have something of universal value to offer 'us' is not recognized. The quotation can be read as an innocent statement by the government of a small country seeking to protect and develop its heritage. At the same time, it echoes the culturalist justifications that Barker (1981) and others have called 'new racism,' and Stolcke (1995) calls 'cultural fundamentalism'. The expression 'generations before us' suggests the importance of ancestry, and implicitly marks a boundary between 'us' and contemporary inhabitants whose family background lies outside Norway. Cultural differences are thus bound to lines of descent. Embedded in this seemingly egalitarian rhetoric is thus an ethnically defined nationalism. This kind of argumentation could, potentially, be used to discriminate. The fact that it is found in a parliamentary white paper indicates that these thought patterns are widely accepted. It seems like wishful thinking to believe that these ideas are limited to the political Right.

Norwegian historians rely on the concept of culture when analyzing the nation-building process in the nineteenth century (Bergreen 1989; Hodne 1995). On the whole, majority Norwegians refer in many situations to a notion of 'Norwegian culture' that is based on the definitions of national culture that were produced in the nineteenth century. These definitions were founded on specific interpretations of the history of the middle ages, the ways of life of the free-holding peasants (*bønder*), and the canons of art and literature. In these contexts 'culture' is usually defined by artifacts in the wide sense: works of art, museum pieces and folk dances and reified descriptions of patterns of social action (such as the Norwegian 'love of nature', expressed in outdoor life).

Hegemonic Frames of Interpretation: Separate Discourses and a Double Standard

Wikan's thesis is thus not true as an overall generalization.²⁰ However, a modified version is no doubt valid in particular contexts, if not quite in the way discussed by her. In my study of the Norwegian public debates on immigration (Gullestad 2001a, b; 2002a, b, c; 2003; in press), I focused on what the debates can tell about the ideas and images held by Norwegian majority people. In spite of enormous variation in the nationalities and mother tongues of 'immigrants' on the one hand, and overlapping identities among majority people and 'immigrants', on the other, polarization based on descent has become

the main feature of the emerging discursive hegemony. Norwegian national identity used to be defined in contrast to Danes, Swedes and other Europeans, all of whom were white. Now being white has become a more pronounced dimension of being Norwegian. Exceptions to this unwritten rule do exist, for example there are a few women from an immigrant background who have achieved a prominent position in the media as a kind of honorary Norwegians. They have told their personal stories about oppression and violence and have publicly denounced minority people who appear to be less assimilated than they are. The price for acceptance in the public realm seems to be the confirmation of majority hegemony by the complete rejection of all evidence of difference that could provoke majority people (see also Hervik 2002a).

Discussions about 'immigrants' are thus implicitly also discussions about the ethnic nation, about who 'we' are. In these debates the majority 'we' is constructed as the unmarked normative center in relation to various people who are marked out as different. Within social Darwinism and the eugenics movement, the word 'race' was often used interchangeably with 'nation' and 'folk' (Wodak & Reisigl 1999). In Norway today, the notion of 'skin color' is used more often than the notion of 'race'. 'Skin color' is a metonym for many different features of a person's appearance and can in many situations be regarded as a replacement for the word 'race'. Ideologies of nationalism and racism both overlap and reinforce each other by being each other's framing conditions (Miles 1993:53-79). The common ground is usually an implicit or explicit focus on descent and symbolic kinship (Gullestad 2002c, 2003, in press).

The polarization between the majority and ethnic minorities – between 'us' and 'them' – entails that issues affecting the two categories are often discussed separately. A double standard is applied, both in the mass media and at the kitchen-table. In practice, the double standard means that if a majority person commits a crime, it is usually interpreted as the result of specific psychosocial conditions. But if an 'immigrant' commits a crime, this is more likely to be seen as characteristic of a certain ethnic culture and/or religion. In this way, the criminal acts by individual 'immigrants' can stigmatize the many innocent people who happen to be perceived as belonging to the same social category.

Less dramatically, the double standard means that 'immigrants' often have to demonstrate their loyalty more explicitly by praising everything Norwegian. Moreover, majority people are less likely to accept criticisms by minority people. Majority anxieties about saying or doing 'something wrong' are often regarded as more important than minority feelings of being discriminated

against. The minorities are expected to learn and appreciate majority traditions and 'basic values,' but majority people do not feel a similar obligation to be interested in what the 'immigrants' bring with them. Taken together this implies a hierarchical relationship between the social categories, with majority people at the apex. Minorities are often criticized without much corresponding critical self-reflection on the part of the majority. Majority–minority relations in Norway thus illustrate both Besigye's poem and Fanon's (1986) idea about the white person's blindness. This is however, not the way Wikan applies her definition. She sees the suffering of quite a few women and children more clearly than most others, but she is blind to the need for other changes in majority practices than 'making more demands' on immigrants.

The Colonial Legacy

Wikan's blindness becomes more understandable when it is examined in relation to the colonial legacy in anthropology. Several scholars have pointed to the affinities between 'race' and 'culture,' not only in contemporary debate, but also historically, within social science theory (Goldberg 1993; Stocking 1982 [1968]; Visweswaran 1998). I want to add to these reflections by briefly discussing the fact that Wikan's empirical generalization that Norwegians do not apply the concept of culture to themselves resembles the main contention in a well-known article by Renato Rosaldo (1988). But whereas Wikan looks at Norwegians, Rosaldo playfully focuses on professional anthropologists. According to Rosaldo, anthropologists use two different culture concepts, the one official, and the other unofficial. The *official* view in anthropology, says Rosaldo, is that all human action is culturally mediated. Cultural analysis means to tease out and identify what is popularly regarded as self-evident and natural. The *unofficial* view is that only some societies 'have' a culture worth studying. Moreover, the unofficial view says that 'they' 'have more culture' than 'us': By courtesy, 'we' extend this postcultural status to people who resemble us. 'What are the consequences of making "our" cultural selves invisible?' he asks (Rosaldo 1988:78). The point of view which Rosaldo calls the unofficial one, seems to encompass 'culture' understood as products and reified descriptions of patterns of action (for example if a group 'has' patrilineal clans). When Rosaldo discusses the so-called official anthropological point of view, he seems to focus on the frames of reference that are taken for granted and used in order to act, interpret and justify. There is thus an unacknowledged shifting between different elements of the culture concept in his discussion.

If 'culture is loose in the streets', the way Wikan presents it with a reference to Paul Bohannan, the reason is not necessarily that common people use an out-dated anthropological notion of culture, but because the man and the woman in the street – and in government – are not as different from the anthropologist as the latter would like to believe. Both anthropologists and people in the street seem to move imperceptibly between the different meanings of the notion of culture. Moreover, in specific contexts, they both use the word 'culture' as something that applies to 'them' and not to 'us'. It is, in other words, a part of contemporary culture, (as taken for granted frames of interpretation within Western modernity) that 'culture' is understood in these multiple and contradictory ways.

Rosaldo is precise when he characterizes one point of view as unofficial and the other as official. On the one hand, racial distinctions are built into the very discipline of anthropology; on the other hand it is by the official view that anthropologists want to be judged. In contrast to people in the street, the discipline of anthropology embodies as a regulative ideal the continuous discovery of and reflection upon ethnocentric prejudices, and has developed a specific method in order to achieve this: the long-term field study.

I do not think it is an accident that the tensions in anthropology between official and unofficial views have become visible at this particular historical conjuncture. Anthropology was established as a discipline and a profession within the structured inequalities of colonialism. To be a professional was – and to some extent still is – to travel long-distance in order to study the life patterns of people who are regarded as 'culturally different'. Anthropological work is to translate the life worlds of others into Western concepts, and to communicate those translated life worlds primarily to colleagues, but also to government agencies, non-government organizations and the enlightened public in the home countries of the anthropologists. Even if American anthropologists have worked on immigration from very early on, they did not normally study majority ways of life. They *engaged* with majority views, but they did not *examine* them as anthropologists. When anthropologists were working close to home, they picked out what they saw as the marginalized, the exotic and the deviant as their research topics. They worked in outlying peasant communities and with specific ethnic groups in the cities. Majority people in Northern Europe and the US were, so to speak, uncharted territory on the map.

In contrast, studying racism now means taking a serious look at majority people 'at home', and this necessitates new priorities, new ways of analytically

framing research projects, and new forms of reflexivity on the part of the anthropological research community. Above all, it is important that the anthropologist is reflexive about his or her own social positioning in terms of gender, class, age, 'skin color' and so on.

Concluding Note

Both Lien and Wikan see some things very clearly and are blind to others. Liens definition of racism applies to those acts that are due to feelings of hatred, in particular the acts of self-defined racists basing themselves on ideological justifications as well as the acts of frustrated people who just practice harassment and violence without any particular justification. It does not apply to the various kinds of culturally and institutionally ingrained discrimination with no hateful intent. Wikan, on her part, has presented a definition of racism that she does not really (or not fully) apply. She sees the very real oppression of some women and children by their own fathers, husbands and brothers, but not majority discrimination other than the reluctance on the part of the government and the media until the middle of the 1990s to engage with this oppression. The examination of their work has alerted me to the need to qualify somewhat the idea presented by way of introduction that 'culture' is now replacing 'race' in the rhetoric of the political Right in many European countries. We are not just dealing with the change from one way of arguing to another, but with a whole range of different contemporary forms of racialization and racism.

Wikan's work in Norway exemplifies that the lack of professional interest in majority ways of life often lead to the lack of a systematic use of empirical data and to a modest reading of the ethnographic literature when anthropologists relatively late in their careers turn their scholarly gaze towards their so-called own society. It is as if scholarly procedures do not have to be quite as rigorous in this, unofficially speaking, culturally invisible zone. Lien, on her part, has done systematic fieldwork among the 'Pakistanis' in Oslo, but also without the necessary professional knowledge of the Norwegian society in which they live. This is a result of her idealized picture of Norwegian society, to which the ways of life of the 'Pakistanis' are implicitly compared.

Although they do not use the words, both Wikan and Lien include hierarchy and inferiorization in their definitions of racism, but in different ways. While Lien maintains that intentions have to be hateful in order for an act to be racist, Wikan maintains the opposite. While Lien exempts most Norwegians from accusations of racism, Wikan accuses large parts of the political

and cultural elite in a way that, nevertheless, does not challenge majority self-images and social perceptions, but has contributed to channeling them in specific directions. In spite of the dramatic differences in their approaches, and their distinctive uses of the notion of racism, there are some similarities between the perspectives of Lien and Wikan. Both scholars converge in practicing an unacknowledged blindness to their own majority perspective and comparing Muslim ways of life in Norway to an idealized notion of 'basic Norwegian values'. The political implications of the public interventions made by the two authors are therefore to contribute to the increasing public emphasis on the shortcomings of the minorities. Both scholars overlook the effects of apparently innocent everyday racialization and discrimination on the people affected when these effects do not confirm the emerging majority hegemony. 'Integration' is increasingly seen as something minority people have to achieve, and not as a process of mutual reflection and adaptation.

This blindness adds a new dimension to the poem by Bertrand Besigye. The triviality of much racialization creates powerlessness because there is no manifest enemy. There is often no hatred, just the application of deeply seated and apparently innocent cultural ideas. In a situation with much thoughtless but not necessarily malicious attention, the 'I' of the poem conjures up a visible adversary with a manifest hatred who can then be confronted and fought. In ways similar to gender-based oppression, racism implies not being recognized as the person one wants to be, to have to adapt to imposed identities, and to have to have one's economic, social and cultural opportunities reduced because of this. Perceptions of gender frequently encode ideas of racial difference, and it is often these many-layered constructions that display the complexity and distinctiveness of particular modes of racialization (Thomas 1994). Racializing practices are intricately woven together with collective memory, national identity, religion, social class, age, gender and sexuality, and are in many contexts present as a hegemonic common sense (Gramsci 1971). They form a part of contemporary culture.

Cultural blindness cannot be totally avoided, but it can be minimized by introducing what I call a multi-perspectival approach. Traditional studies of this or that localized ethnic group tend to construct the object of study in ways that ultimately reinforces stereotypes and limit understanding. In other words, in order to understand the life situations of 'immigrants', one cannot just study 'immigrants'. The structures they simultaneously inhabit and have to adapt to must also be explored. We need multi-sited fieldwork and analytical frameworks spanning ethnic groups, relations of dominance as well as

social fields of varying scale. The value of 'migration studies' for anthropology is potentially not only that they teach us about new variations in social, cultural and economic adaptation, but also that they force anthropologists to become truly comparative by not excluding the people (unofficially) 'without culture' from the research agenda. I want to argue here that this is a necessary prerequisite in order to fully decolonize anthropological knowledge.

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Notes

1. See Balibar 1991, Barker 1981, Goldberg 1993, Rex 1986, Stolcke 1995, Taguieff 1987, and Wieviorka 1995. Some of these researchers still use the concept of 'racism' (Rex 1986; Frankenberg 1993; Goldberg 1993; Miles 1993; Van Dijk 1993; Wieviorka 1995; Winant 2000). Verena Stolcke (1995) uses the concept of 'cultural fundamentalism,' Martin Barker (1981), Etienne Balibar (1991) and Peter Hervik (1999) use 'new racism' or 'neo-racism', while André Taguieff (1987) uses 'cultural differentialism' and Goldberg (1993) 'racist expressions'. For Stolcke (1995) 'xenophobia' is also a central notion.
2. Other anthropologists in Norway, and in particular Thomas Hylland Eriksen, have followed the more common anthropological track by focusing critically on interethnic relations rather than on racism. Eriksen also publishes both for the research community and for the general audience (see for example Eriksen 1993).
3. Translated from the Norwegian by the author of this article, italics in the original. I thank Peter Trudgill for valuable help with the translation of the poem.
4. Norway became an independent nation state only in 1905, after having been the junior partner in a union with Sweden for almost one hundred years, and before that it was under the Danish crown for four hundred years. It is common to conceive of the relationship to Denmark as similar to a colonial relationship, but not the union with Sweden. During the union with Sweden Norway had its own constitution and its own parliament. The new independence from 1905 was broken by the Nazi German occupation from 1940 to 1945 during World War II.
5. Jenssen 1994; Brottveit 1996; and Pihl 2000 are three exceptions.
6. Pointed out by Næss 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1999; Loona 1985, 1987, 1988, Qureshi 1988, 1996, 1997.

7. Examples are Brox 1991, 1997; T.B. Eriksen 1986; Hagtvedt 1993; Long 1992; Skirbekk 1993, 1998.
8. Pointed out by Loona 1988; Qureshi 1996.
9. One important exception is Høgmo 1998.
10. Lien calls them 'Pakistanis' (*pakistanere*). This term is popularly used neutrally (and sometimes pejoratively). There is also a Norwegian equivalent of 'Paki' (*Pakkis*). Even if there is a considerable number of immigrants from Sri Lanka and Vietnam, the Norwegian terms equivalent to 'of the Indian subcontinent' or 'Asian' are seldom used. In contrast, the terms equivalent to 'African' and 'Latin American' are common.
11. All the quotes in this article are translated from the Norwegian by me.
12. For example, in 1914 one could see an entire 'Congo village' at the Constitution Centennial exhibition in Oslo (Christensen & Eriksen 1992).
13. Women usually complain if men stare at them. Some feminists even wear T-shirts saying that 'my breasts do not speak'.
14. This is in my view also a misunderstanding of Miles, but that is not the main point here.
15. Recently (2002) Wikan has adapted and further developed her Norwegian book into a book in English.
16. Wikan is not consistent in her discussion of the concept of culture. She both wants to get rid of it, and implicitly she builds on notion of 'culture' as a bounded entity when she refers to 'basic Norwegian values.'
17. In the article in English Wikan makes explicit her own political influence in Norway: 'Over the past three years I have gone public with just such a critique, voiced it through the media (newspapers, television, radio), public talks and lectures, and through my book *Mot en ny norsk underklasse* (*Towards a new Norwegian underclass*, 1995a). I believe I have played some part in making the government change its course' (Wikan 1999:59).
18. Wikan's work has also been used by the ultranationalists in Denmark (Hervik 2002b).
19. See also Wikan 2002:81 where a similar definition is presented.
20. See also Melhuus 1999:76: 'I believe that the way the concept of culture is used to designate otherness springs out of a rooted understanding of culture that applies to us; moreover, such a concept of culture (the implicit in the "we") is a prerequisite for any notion of them'. I agree with Melhuus, but want to put the problem the other way around: the discourse about 'them' is a prerequisite for the construction of 'us'. Over time the others 'our culture' is being defined in relation to have changed.

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